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CERTAINTY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

BY
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CERTAINTY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

LIFE AND WORK

LITTLE BOOKS ON FAMILIAR THEMES

1. LETTERS TO YOUNG CHRISTIANS OF TO-DAY
2. THE WORK OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL
3. SOCIAL LIFE AND RELATIONS OF NEW TESTAMENT TIMES
4. OURSELVES AND OTHERS
5. CERTAINTY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

OTHERS TO FOLLOW

CERTAINTY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

BY

FREDERIC PLATT, M.A., D.D.

Author of 'Immanence and Christian Thought,' &c.

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NOTE

DR. PLATT'S experience as Tutor in Theology is here put at the service of thoughtful men and women who wish to know the certainty of the truths that they have accepted, and on which they have built their faith. His Introduction explains how he came to handle the subject. The papers have been widely read in newspapers and magazines, and many will be glad to have them gathered together in this little Manual. Only a trained theologian could have treated the great questions with such clearness, and shown how they commend themselves to reasonable men.

If the Church of Christ is to move forward to the winning of the world for its Master, it needs strong conviction; and this bracing study of the Certainties of Religious Experience, the Value of History, the Function of Reason, the authority of the Church, and the Bible, leads up to the final authority in the Person and redemptive energies of Jesus Christ Himself. To have these subjects brought together, and to see how each supports the rest, forms a cumulative argument for Christianity which nothing can reasonably resist.

JOHN TELFORD.

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Certainty and Christian Faith

I

INTRODUCTION

THE seven chapters of this little book have already been published—as a series of articles in religious journals in this country and in the Colonies—in the *Magazine* of the Epworth Press, the *Methodist Churchman* in South Africa, the *Christian Guardian* in Canada, the *Spectator* in Australia, and the *New Zealand Methodist Times*.

Owing to certain more or less articulate misgivings in the Churches of the English-speaking communities, resulting from recent controversies upon the vexed question of the ultimate authority on which a Christian man rests his faith, the writer was asked to prepare a series of short articles, which, whilst entirely free from the spirit of controversy, might help the perplexed by presenting a positive and constructive position in regard to this problem.

There was ample evidence that the chief difficulty with many thoughtful Christian people and Christian workers arose from the fact that they had no easily-accessible means of hearing the case for the strong foundations of personal religious faith broadly, briefly, and at the same time carefully stated. In particular they were not sufficiently aware of the cumulative character of the authority

for Christian faith. Consequently they were considerably disquieted when it became clear to their minds that any one particular phase of the evidence upon which they had been accustomed to rely with entire confidence could no longer bear satisfactorily the full weight they had placed upon it. In many cases this primary evidential value had been intimately associated in their thoughts with certain traditional interpretations of the supernatural, and with an ultimate appeal to miracles as proof of the credibility of their religious beliefs. This had been the accepted form in which Christian apologetics had been presented to them. What they most feared, therefore, as a result of any critical review of the basis of faith, was its apparent tendency towards the elimination of the supernatural, and the manifestations of it in the miraculous. For them to lose the supernatural sanctions of their faith would be to cut the nerve which linked their religion with the energies of divine grace.

The central problem, therefore, which presented itself, was how they might become very sure that the ultimate certainty for their faith was of God. If they could be well assured that the changes whose effects they feared were not changes in the sure and essential values of the supernatural and miraculous in the Christian religion, but only changes in the modes in which these terms and their implications could be conceived and expressed, the shadows and hesitation which troubled their faith would at least be relieved.

As this question of the significance of the supernatural and the specific character of the miraculous that may be confidently used as a credential of Christian certainties is not directly discussed in the

following chapters, a very brief reference may be made to it here.

Whilst we are justified in asserting with deep and ever-increasing confidence that the certainties of the Christian life are indubitably supernatural in their source and sanction, it may at the same time be true that, as Dr. Sanday has suggested, ' we need a new way of stating the supernatural.' Certainly the conception of it which presents natural and supernatural in such sharp antithesis that it involves the current assumption of the undivineness of the natural, and the unnaturalness of the divine, is no longer a mode of stating its significance, which can be acceptable either to the religious or the scientific mind. And no view which implies that God is present and at work in the supernatural, and absent from the realm of the natural, can stand the searching tests to which every credential for the truth of the Christian faith must submit. God is everywhere and always at work in the natural as He is in the supernatural. The one sphere is the complement, not the antithesis, of the other. The ' supernatural,' as it is the source and becomes the strength of certainty for Christian faith, is simply our term for expressing that spiritual activity of God by which He achieves in us His redemptive purpose. And this, notwithstanding the frailties of our flesh, the sinfulness of our hearts, and the subtle resistance of our wills in presence of ' the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved . . . even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.'

The ' supernatural ' stands, therefore, in Christian thinking and experience, for the spiritual meaning and end of all God's redeeming activities in nature

and in grace. It is that constraint by which He demonstrates His power for us and in us as the Author and Perfecter of our salvation. And Christianity is a supernatural religion just because it is the religion of an accomplished and experienced redemption. In this reality lies the miraculous authority for the faith of a Christian man. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that he should accustom himself to look for the ultimate proof of the verities of the Christian faith in the realm of moral and spiritual certainties rather than in the region of physical compulsions, however mysterious or majestic these may appear. For might, even if it seems almighty, is never in itself a sure vindication of right.

Is it not this point of view of the 'supernatural' which lies behind our Lord's attitude towards even His own miracles? How frequently He asserted that the 'wonder' must become the 'sign' before it could be truly a miracle. For it is ever the spiritual meaning and message of the marvellous event in the order of nature which constitutes the miraculous and supernatural. In the Gospels Jesus is constantly admonishing men against the expectation of God's magical interference with the order of nature; whilst as constantly He exalts the spiritual miracle of the forgiveness of sins. 'Whether is easier, to say unto the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk?'

There is a saying attributed to Mohammed, 'If you hear that a mountain has changed its place, you may believe it. But if you are told that a man has changed his character, scout the assertion as preposterous.' And yet the evidence for the reality

of the spiritual miracle of a changed character is so incontestable among us to-day that many critical thinkers, whom the traditional view of a contradiction or suspension of the physical order of the universe leaves with obstinate misgivings, freely acknowledge it. Without at present passing any judgement upon the possibility of the occurrence of a miracle in the physical order—for every event so reputed must be dealt with by historical and scientific tests appropriate to its claims—we may assert that the experience of a redeemed and transfigured life is the supreme miracle which attests the faith of a Christian.

> What we have felt and seen
> With confidence we tell,
> And publish to the sons of men
> The signs infallible.

Now such miracles are constantly being wrought. They are wrought also within a realm of reality, where immediate verification is accessible to all of us who are ready to fulfil the ethical and spiritual conditions which the nature of the case requires. For this reason, and for others which might be named, such spiritual miracles appear to be the evidence best suited to meet the perplexities of the present generation. These indubitable signs of the operation of the power of God in the renewal and transformation of human lives, in spite of most untoward contradictions in ethical character and circumstance, are credentials of Christian certainty that most readily secure the immediate consent of reason and conscience. Spiritual regeneration of this order witnessed in foreign missionary fields or in the creation of new ethical histories—heroic,

sacrificial, unworldly—nearer home, create and sustain deeper convictions of the miraculous in the Christian sense of the term than any which a former generation discovered in the academic discussions of Paley and the school of apologists he represents.

That this should be the case is in harmony with the mind and teaching of Jesus. Such happenings as these are among 'the greater works' that those who obey Him should do in His name. It is noticeable also in the course of Christian history, that the closer men have come in any generation to the realities of ethical and spiritual renewal, the less dependent they have become upon the evidential value of the supernatural manifest in physical miracle. Such redemptive acts are signs that God is the living God at work in the present as truly as in the past; and they are miraculous in character because they register an activity of God that is not accounted for by any antecedents in the natural order of the world. For a Christian man knows that he owes his redemptive experiences, not to the order of nature, but to the immediacy of an act of God—an act undaunted and unhindered by the conscious bondage to the habits of a sinful past in which a man finds himself entangled when he realizes his relation to the fixed sequences of the order of nature; He is 'born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

For such reasons as these the reader will find that the fundamental contention of the following chapters may be summarized thus: Because Christian experience is essentially miraculous and cannot be explained by nature as nature is

interpreted by physical and psychological science, the man in whose life God has revealed Himself as Redeemer and Renewer has in this wonder of wonders the ultimate credential of the supernatural basis of his faith, and needs no surer witness to its certainties.

But because these ethical and spiritual certitudes, being more and wider than an individual and incommunicable experience, are set in harmony with a rational order, permanently secured in an historical record, confirmed and enriched by the collective experience of a spiritual community persisting through many generations as the Church of Christ, and enshrined, interpreted, vitalized, and verified in Holy Scripture—the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever—it is of great importance that a Christian man should be able to estimate the value of these cumulative expressions of authority for his faith relatively to each other and to the primary ground of the certainty he has in his personal and indefeasible experience of redemption.

As, however, there exists upon each and all of these several forms in which authority for the Christian faith has been embodied a voluminous and opulent literature which, as a rule, the average Christian man has little time or opportunity to consult for himself, the following chapters aim at suggesting, in fragmentary fashion, some lines of thinking on these subjects, which it is hoped may be of service in the present perplexity.

II

IS CERTAINTY ATTAINABLE?

A WISTFUL desire moves in the mind of many Christian people to be very sure of the ground of confidence in the faith they hold and by which they live. This is natural and inevitable. The issue for them is so vital that they cannot be indifferent to the signs of unrest which trouble them. For it would be foolish to close their eyes to obvious indications that many earnest Christian men and women, who had thought themselves to be sure of the basis of their faith, are not so sure as they thought they were.

This may have happened because they have come to suspect that the kind of certainty which is available is not the kind of certainty that they think ought, in the nature of the case, to have been provided for them. They may have looked for a certainty as fixed and unalterable in its nature as that which makes them sure of the coming of the seasons or of the ebb and flow of the tides. It does not always occur to them that this may be too easy and too mechanical a way of certainty in regard to matters which are only knowable by the exercise of moral and spiritual faculties. For assurance of such realities depends upon the soul's responsive obedience to an inward illumination, and not upon merely external authority.

Still, it seems reasonable to ask that, in some form in which the plain man may not go astray, some

authoritative guidance in matters of faith should lie within reach of his apprehension. He feels that he needs a final court of appeal, to which his own and other people's views of religious faith may be referred when their aspects differ and their angles do not coincide. Surely there must somewhere be such a standard. For a given standard seems to be essential to confidence that one's faith is truly based. And yet, when he comes to inquire where this authority has its seat, he is met by an apparent rivalry of authorities, each of which claims to afford a sufficient, if not a final, ground of certainty. It becomes increasingly clear, the more carefully he seeks repose of mind, that separate groups of Christian men, who seem to be equally sincere in the spirit and practice of their religion, are divided in their allegiance regarding the seat of religious authority. Temperamental, ecclesiastical, and intellectual tendencies separate them. These differences are so acute as almost to constitute different religions amongst those who in common profess and call themselves Christians. It is not easy, for instance, to measure the width of the difference which divides the devout Romanist, who surrenders himself without reserve to the infallible authority of his Church, from the loyal disciple of 'The Inner Light,' who acknowledges no higher authority than the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit vouchsafed to the individual soul. And even within these more extreme positions we can hardly fail to note the instinctive suspicion with which a believer in the infallible authority of Holy Scripture regards the claims of reason to exercise some authoritative judgement in matters of faith.

Similar misgivings and hesitations emerge in presence of the more or less conscious competition discernible between the historical and spiritual values by which the ultimate authority for faith is estimated. Indeed, so subtle is the disturbance of mind which follows the search for certainty, that some who seek it are disposed to sympathize with Newman's confession in his *Apologia*, that the only certainty he had found in his quest was the certainty that certainty was impossible. But we cannot rest there. Newman did not. Necessity is upon us to turn again to the quest. And the quest, we are convinced, should not be hopeless. It is the purpose of these short chapters to suggest that there is a satisfying ground of certainty for the Christian faith. Where, then, may we look for its seat?

It is customary to regard Christian certainty as resident in one or other of the following authorities for faith—Christian Experience, Christian History, Reason, the Christian Church, the Christian Scriptures. It may appear that these are so interrelated and interdependent that they cannot stand wholly apart. This is true to a certain extent. Probably the authority we seek may ultimately be found in their cumulative value. Yet their emphases are distinct. They may, therefore, be considered individually. In practice, indeed, they are commonly divided. Each has its circle of influence. Nor are these circles concentric. Each line of approach has its value. No one of them is a negligible direction in seeking Christian certainty. At the same time, not one of them can be considered conclusive in itself. How, then, we may ask, are we to discriminate between them?

That is the crux of our inquiry. Our clue is to be found in the fact of their relative value. Whilst each is important, it is not important in the same degree. Their values may be, and ought to be, discriminated as primary and secondary when we consider them as grounds of authority for faith. The confusion which has disturbed the balance of Christian certainty has resulted from misjudgements, which have given to a secondary note of authority the function and finality of that which is primary.

This is borne out by the history of Christian thought and by profoundly divisive movements in ecclesiastical history. Each of these forms of authority for faith can claim to have known a dominant period when it has worn the purple and issued its decrees concerning Christian faith. And the primacy of each has, in its turn, been challenged by one of the others as usurping a supremacy to which no valid title could be produced. For it is easy to see that, wherever there are several rival claimants for the seat of authority in the field, the first question that emerges when divergences of utterance arise between them is, Which of these is primary? And which of them, because of its primacy, is entitled to rule or arbitrate upon the contending claims of other forms of authority for faith?

Now, the history of the Christian faith is the record of the rise of such conflict of authorities. One of the deeper causes, for instance, of the schism which divided the unity of the early Church into the great historic communions of East and West was the question whether ultimate authority for faith was internal or external—that is, whether

it lay in the immediate teaching of truth by the indwelling Spirit of God, or was developed as a dogmatic deposit of truth within the organized institution of the Church. Again, at the Reformation the Christian Church was divided by a similar fundamental distinction. The Protestants stood for the privilege of a direct approach to Christ Himself by the individual soul seeking religious certainty, and for the consequent right of private judgement in matters of faith. This was the demand that challenged the claim of the Roman Church that final authority lay in her dogmatic tradition of infallible truth. An issue not essentially different is joined to-day. It is seen in the appeal for supreme authority made, on the one hand, to the historic faith as interpreted in the dogmatic teaching of the 'Catholic' Church—either Roman or Anglican—and on the other to the verification of the historic faith in the present personal experience of redemption by the Christian believer. For it is fundamentally the question of Christian certainty which separates what is known as Institutional Religion from the Religion of the Spirit. Even Protestant Christians owning a common loyalty to the authority of the Word of God discover themselves confusing the authority of the infallible Spirit with that of the infallible letter of the written Word. And thus, unfortunately, opposing groups on the question of authority for faith are found in the same denomination of Christians.

The only way to ascertain the relative value of these diverse claims for authority is to examine each of them carefully and impartially. But that is a difficult and delicate task. The average Christian hesitates to undertake it. It seems to

him that, judging from the characteristic teaching of Jesus, whom the common people heard gladly, he might reasonably expect that a sure ground of authority would be within his reach. We believe that there is such a ground of assurance which every Christian man may find. It is nigh him; it is within him. By it he may save himself from the bewilderment of competing voices and from the unrest of conflicting claims, whether critical or ecclesiastical.

III

THE CERTAINTIES OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

THE primary authority for the Christian faith lies where all certainties lie, in the realities of consciousness. Consciousness is the ultimate ground of certainty for a man, because it is ultimate for all knowledge. When a man says, 'I am conscious of a fact or a truth,' he means, 'I know that fact or that truth': that is, 'I am sure of it'; 'It is real for me.' All our knowledge comes to us in experience. Knowledge is a state of consciousness of which I am directly and indubitably aware. To be certain is to know that I know. When I am sure, I know the experience in question to be mine—my very own. There can be nothing more certain for me than my own consciousness. When I say, 'I know,' I mean, 'I know myself as having such and such an experience of a given reality.' We cannot stay to discuss the validity of this theory of knowledge. That is the task of the philosopher. But when he has fulfilled his task he has only set forth in reasoned form the rational grounds for a certainty of which every man is aware when he says to himself or to others, 'I know.'

Now, religious consciousness is a phase or activity of personal consciousness, and it possesses precisely the same values as ultimate authority for religious

faith as the consciousness of realities outside the sphere of religion possesses for them. The primary seat of authority for religion, therefore, is inward and personal, not outward and corporate in institution or creed. The certainty of God is not the conclusion of a logical syllogism nor the infallible record of a printed book. It is an immediate experience of consciousness. The familiar theistic arguments for historic revelation simply confirm and expand the significance of such immediate experiences. What, therefore, is not true for *me* is not of vital ethical and religious authority, whatever its speculative, historical, or ecclesiastical value may be. Credentials or infallibilities which find no verification in experience cannot be ultimate for religion. God is His own witness in the nature of man—a 'Light which lighteth every man coming into the world.' We maintain, then, that the authority of religious experience is primary, both in time and importance, for religious faith. Such realities of religious consciousness have no legitimate rival as a final court of appeal for Christian certainty. For that of which a man is sure in the deep places of his spiritual nature he seeks no ultimate proof elsewhere. As a brilliant philosopher assures us, 'The man who demands a reality more solid than the religious consciousness, seeks he knows not what.' When, therefore, within the regions of his ethical and spiritual activity, a man can say deeply and reverently, 'I know,' it is an end for him of controversy as to the reality of the things of God.

Further, Christian certitude founds itself upon the principle that those who trust and obey shall know. In periods of perplexity the Christian man

must fall back upon his own experience, and find within it a sufficient ground for his faith. No external authority, however venerable and venerated, can of itself, and so long as it remains simply external, become a vital and valid authority for Christian faith. All such external authorities must become internal by submitting themselves to verification in living experience before they can rightly prove themselves authoritative for faith. We never reach by any external authority that firmness and permanence of conviction of reality which may be drawn from the simple act by which the soul turns to and interprets its own experience and commits itself loyally to the constraint that experience lays upon its choice and activities.

It is sometimes urged against the validity of experience, as the expression of authority for faith, that it is a state of mere feeling, and that emotion at its highest is an unsatisfactory basis for faith. But this objection arises from a mistaken notion of the true content of experience, whether it is considered either religiously or psychologically. 'Experience' is a term by which we denote the whole activities of human personality, whether in states of feeling, thought, or will. These elements of personality are each and all intermingling activities in religious consciousness. Religious experience is activity of the whole man. No part of his complex personality is quiescent in his religion. And no authority for faith can be adequate which does not dominate emotion, thought, and will. And just as true religion is expressed in full and harmonious personal relations between God and man, so the ultimate authority for religious faith is the personal experience on the part of man of the

immediate personal contact of the Divine Spirit with the human spirit in its manifold activities.

Another and more frequent objection to the authority of religious experience is that it is purely subjective, that is, that it presents an authority no deeper than the fluctuating moods of consciousness which constitute each man's inner life. Consequently it is merely human authority, and as vague and variable as each man's individuality. But this objection fails to recognize an awareness in every religious experience that what is experienced has an objective cause; it is experience *of*, an experience of a Reality which is not-self and is more than self. For in its very essence religion is relationship to Another, an awareness of dependence upon and obligation to Another, higher and holier than self. The fact lying behind religious experience is the fact to which we give the name 'God.' In becoming aware of ourselves, we become aware of Another. The subject which has the experience, and the Object from which the experience proceeds as its Cause, are known together and immediately in the religious consciousness. 'The deepest thing in human experience does not rise out of the depths of the soul, though it rises within the soul's area, but it ascends from the deeps of God.' Authority for faith, therefore, is not a man's experience as such, but that Reality which he experiences. The things of which we are sure are true not so much *by* experience as *for* it; they are the reflection in religious consciousness of causes adequate to produce the certainties which experience recognizes.

Moreover, the authority for faith which is distinctively *Christian* faith is given in an experience which is specifically Christian experience, because it is

an immediate experience of Christ as its Cause. The source of authority for the Christian faith is in personal knowledge of Him who is its Author and Perfecter within the living experience of the Christian man who is sure. 'I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.' The ground of my certainty is not so much the fact that I have religious experience, but the awareness of whom or of what I have experience; I know *Him*. As we shall see later, Christian experience apart from the historical fact of Christ is unintelligible. Still, it is only when the historical Christ is known in personal experience that His moral and spiritual authority is ultimate for faith.

This assertion becomes more surely based when we take into consideration that it is Christ in His definite and distinctive relation to my moral and spiritual consciousness as Redeemer, of whom I have the experience, which gives certainty to my Christian faith. It is in the unique experience of forgiveness, of reconciliation and of newness of life, that authority for the Christian faith has its seat. The experience of a heart 'strangely warmed' is the indubitable certainty of the faith which is essentially Christian. The evangelical faith is true just as it interprets the evangelical experience. And thus the evangelical experience becomes the ultimate seat of authority for the evangelical faith. This has been, and ought still to be, the particular characteristic of Methodist apologetics.

My God, I am Thine;
What a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine

It is in this region of Divine Grace that we shall free ourselves from hesitancy or misgiving, and be taught to speak with an accent of assurance and with commanding authority, whatever the results of critical investigation may prove to be. In this region of redemption and moral action we touch Reality. The credential of the Christian faith is not a correct creed, but a new creation. If authority does not lie in the certainty of a changed life, where can it be found? If experience of Christ as Saviour is not real, moral reality and religious authority have no meaning.

IV

THE VALUE OF HISTORY

WHILST no external authority can be final, there are external authorities which possess a derived or secondary authority because they corroborate and interpret the findings of the supreme tribunal within the human spirit, or suggest the necessity of appeal to that final court. Their secondary place in the order of values follows from the degree of certainty they are able to contribute. At their best they can contribute only indirect, formal, or partial assurance, although their cumulative value is of great importance in its relation to every presentation of authority for the Christian faith.

Christian experience holds its place as the primary ground of certainty because of the superior quality of the knowledge it affords. Human knowledge falls into categories. It may be probable, rational, or logical, intuitive, ethical, or demonstrative. Christian experience is first-hand, demonstrative knowledge, continuously verifiable and continually verified. Its sanctuary of truth is within the certitudes of a spiritual personality. It is based upon intuitions which know Reality by direct contact, and verify it by facts of the moral and spiritual consciousness which demonstrate the certainty of a divinely renewed and renewing grace of redemption.

Historical certainty, on the other hand, has to

do with knowledge which is probable. Its contribution to the sum of authority which constrains us to commit ourselves to loyal acceptance of the Christian faith is of essential value, because Christianity is essentially an historical religion. The historicity of the life and character of its Founder, and the historical credibility of the documentary record of His teaching and work, are of fundamental importance to its truth, and to our interpretation of its authority. The effect of this historical background is to distinguish the faith and experience of the Christian man from the esoteric religious experience of pure Mysticism. And any attitude of careless indifference towards the authentic historical basis of the Christian faith becomes, in the end, a menace to the permanence of its ethical and spiritual values.

Nevertheless, we must face the fact that the authority of history cannot give that quality or degree of certainty in which the Christian consciousness can confidently rest. The reason of this is the fact that the authoritative value of all history depends upon testimony. And all human testimony is admittedly liable to fallibility. The facts upon which the authority of history depends are remote in time, and beyond the reach of the verification of personal experience. They are primary only for those whose experience made the history. And their authority is final only for those who have first-hand experience of the events whose record the historian has preserved. Consequently, when history has given all that it has to contribute to the creation of religious certainty, it has only produced probable truth. We are constrained, therefore, to accept a canon of much importance

in considering the sources of authority for the Christian faith—that the value of the authority of history at its best is precisely the value of probability at its highest.

But to acknowledge the correctness of this judgement is by no means to disparage the true place of historical authority for religious faith. That is still a high place, even when we cannot hold that it is the first place. For it is undoubtedly true that the presentation of the historic testimony to the nature and power of the Christian faith has preceded and conditioned the verification and consequent authority of this testimony in the fresh living experience of succeeding generations of Christians. What they have received from the historical testimony of prophets, evangelists, and apostles has suggested and stimulated personal experience of the things of God and of Christ. That which they have historically received has also given to the contents of the religious consciousness a distinctly Christian quality. On the authority of Gospels and Epistles they 'heard the words that, one by one, the touch of Life has turned to truth.'

The fact that historical testimony, although falling short of the final certitude attaching to present and immediate spiritual experience, exercises such power emphasizes the contribution made by probable truth to the authority for the Christian faith. Probability appears to be part of the gracious discipline of God for Christian life. For it requires that he who would come to the full assurance of understanding must follow the light and exercise the grace he has received. Such ethical and spiritual exercise is never inevitable.

Probability, therefore, is the guide of life in the Christian, as in other spheres of moral action. We act upon it in most important enterprises and decisions. To refuse to do so would be folly. But, whilst its authority for the Christian faith may neither be ignored nor depreciated, it is neither sufficient nor final. It is, therefore, in the interests of Christian certainty that we should frankly acknowledge this situation. For to rest its eternal hope and destiny upon any degree of probability is a venture from which the Christian soul instinctively shrinks. It seeks a God and a Redeemer who are more than characters in history. 'The God ye took from a printed book' is too remote for healing or help or salvation. A cherished memory of the Jesus of history among the hills of Galilee, however beautiful, is unequal, alone, to the task of dispelling the haunting distress of a present uncertainty. We crave to see and know Him for ourselves, to feel His touch, and to hear His voice.

And indeed, this appeal to personal experience of Christ Jesus the Saviour for ultimate Christian certainty rather strengthens than otherwise the high estimate ascribed to the truthfulness of New Testament history. For such an experience of moral and spiritual regeneration carries with it the implication that the great historic figure of Jesus Christ in the New Testament is the only adequate explanation of the origin and character of that unique type of redemptive experience which is distinctively Christian. Apart from knowledge of the historical Person of Christ and His redeeming work a certain type of religious experience has been and is being produced in the religious

consciousness. This is witnessed by the contents of the religious consciousness where it is stimulated or interpreted by non-Christian or pre-Christian beliefs and practices. But it is apparent that the specifically Christian experience would have been impossible without the authority of the Christian history. The living Christ apart from the historical Christ would be an enigma. And if He alone can be deemed to be the one sufficient reason of the undeniable salvation we now enjoy, the Christian mind must present a definite historical answer to the question, Who and what must Christ have been to explain the conscious experience of a redeemed soul?

So that we are constrained to the conclusion that our preference for Christian experience as the primary authority for the Christian faith implies no infringement of the legitimate rights of the historical Christian documents. These will be, as they must be, judged by the generally-accepted historical standards. The application to them of such tests as are now freely applied to historical documents of all kinds will give to the historical portions of the New Testament at their best the highest degree of probability. And that is the highest authority which can possibly be attached to any historical documents whatsoever. And, at the worst, the application of these critical methods and results to the New Testament history will simply have the effect of reducing its degree of probability to a lower point. But such reduction would not alter the *kind* of authority which historical writings provide. It would only reduce the *degree* of it. For, alike at its lowest and at its highest, the authority afforded by the historical

Gospels will still rest within the sphere of probable knowledge, because such a kind of certainty is the only kind that any historical documents can yield, even when estimated at their greatest value.

One other point is important here. The appeal to Christian experience as the primary authority for the Christian faith is not to be regarded, with misgiving, as a strategic position to which the Christian apologist has been driven by the exigencies of modern literary criticism, or by the unhesitating application to the Christian Gospels of the newer historical methods of the schools. Rather, the supremacy of the appeal to Christian experience is intrinsic. In no case is it a second-best authority, to which the pressure of necessity has reduced the Christian man. It is the best, under any and all circumstances, as an ultimate authority. And, even if the facts and teaching of the Gospels which lie at the foundation of the Christian faith had never been subjected to a breath of critical suspicion, a frank and final appeal to the authority of spiritual experience would still have been the most to be desired, in order to give the deepest note of certainty to the Christian faith. For the appeal to the living, the present, the personal must always be higher than the appeal to the historical past.

V

THE FUNCTION OF REASON

IT has never been an easy task for Christian thinkers to adjust with precision the relations between faith and reason. These have frequently been set in antagonism. Each has entered into competition with the other for mastery in the realm of religious authority. They have even anathematized each other in the name of religion. This has happened because their interrelation with each other has been misunderstood. They are not mutually exclusive. The man who believes is the same man who reasons. Both are religious functions in the one personality. 'Human nature craves to be both religious and rational, and the life which is not both is neither.' Reason and revelation are complementary forces in the complex structure of Christian certainty. But confusion and contradiction between the two have arisen whenever one has sought to usurp the place of the other. The chief of these reactions has been directed against the claim that Reason constitutes a sufficient authority for Religion independently of Revelation ; or, as stated in more moderate fashion, that the whole content of divine revelation must be interpreted and ultimately authorized in terms of the logical understanding. It is against this fundamental assumption of Rationalism that the speculative intellect is itself capable by its own power of discovering, appropriating, and certifying

those moral and spiritual truths which constitute the Christian faith that the modern mind, both philosophical and religious, is in revolt.

The present-day distrust of purely rational processes as authorizing religious truth is the outcome of a series of cumulative proofs that the speculative intellect cannot provide a basis of certainty for the characteristic features of the Christian faith. It is more than doubtful indeed whether bare speculative processes—the effort of what has been described as 'inhuman, incompetent, and impracticable intellectualism'—are in themselves sufficient to give adequate authority even to what is called 'natural religion.' For the psychologists have shown that even the religious consciousness which stops far short of a Christian experience is much more than a group of logical propositions owing their origin to metaphysical reflection. For such a consciousness is rich in emotional content, quick with intuitions, restless with conative impulses springing from deep wells of personality, where the wisdom of theoretical reason confesses she has nothing to draw with. 'No solution of the problem of God and man can be reached from a consideration of man as a merely cognitive being.'[1] This judgement is typical of the dominant philosophy of religion. And we are bound to recognize the profound change in the method of reaching certainty which has been wrought by the modern study of biology and psychology. While in the past the realm of certainty has mainly been ruled by the intellect as an absolute sovereign, it is now the sphere in which the creative forces of will, the strong executive of feeling, and the primary

[1] Pringle-Pattison, *Idea of God*, p. 291.

instincts of the soul have free play. 'Conation, not cognition, is regarded as fundamental to life. It is the blind impulse to live that leads on to knowledge, just as it is for the sake of life that knowledge is valued, and not vice versa.'[1]

This doctrine of the primacy of the practical—or, in other words, the appeal to the whole experience of the soul for ultimate authority—tends to dominate modern religious thought. For the rational is only one element in consciousness. Alone it is without title to make sure our faith. Consciousness is seen to be larger than cognition. Life is more than logic. A purely intellectual solution of the problem of the ultimate seat of authority, even if that were possible, would now be felt even by the philosopher to be inadequate. For this faith comprehends the unsearchable riches of Christ, revealed and appropriated in the undoubted ethical and spiritual realities of redemption. Here the Christian experience must be primary. For the facts of the Christian consciousness go before their interpretation, just as realities precede their definition. Here again modern philosopher and modern Christian thinker may agree: 'Knowledge is not primary; it is a consequent; it is relegated to a derived position, secondary in origin. It is not something separate and self-sufficing; it is involved in the process by which life is sustained and evolved; consciousness is before knowledge; experience before reason as its rational interpreter.'[2] So also it is the immediate experience of God in His contact with the soul that provides the facts which it is the function of reason to describe. The

[1] James Ward, *Realm of Ends*, p. 198.

[2] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 87.

function of reason, then, is to become the handmaid of the authoritative Christian experience. She has no authority to determine the possible, nor power to create the reality of Christian experience, nor skill to unseal the springs which feed its deeps. The sensitive conscience and the forgiven soul hold secrets of certainty that the speculative intellect cannot challenge.

At the same time the temper which disparages reason disparages Christian faith. However profoundly based in Christian experience, authority for Christian faith has a place for the activities of reason. Christian certainty, whilst it may be super-rational in its nature, cannot be irrational. Reason has contributions to make and even tests to apply to the complete expression of authority for faith. Whilst she cannot create the Christian certainties, reason is a greatly valued instrument for recognizing and using them. For it is a supremely rational function to recognize the higher realm of reality from which authority for faith proceeds, and to offer credible attestation to its authentic and primary value. Reason can demonstrate that it is neither rational nor scientific to ignore the authority of aspects of reality which she herself cannot disclose. These must be taken into account in estimating the scale of relative values by which the claims for certainty are examined. It is the function of reason also to translate the fine adjustments of Christian certainty out of personal experiences of redemption into the authoritative message of the Christian gospel, and to interpret this into forms best suited to the intellectual life of the age. Nor can we deny her right to scrutinize articles of the Christian faith presented in credal or confessional

form in order to confirm or disallow their rational authority as binding upon the understanding of Christian men.

Nevertheless, whilst it is obviously true that reason has its own spheres of certainty, which are of great value, these are not ethical or spiritual spheres. Morality and religion have their certainty in themselves. They fail in certitude, if made to depend merely upon rational or historical evidence. They demand a kind of certainty which is peculiar to their own nature and appropriate to their contents. And that is experimental. For the authority they exert logical certainty is not of the highest value. It is not congruous with their specific character. For the authority of a demonstration that is logically irresistible is devoid of ethical quality. It is coercive. And the essence of ethical and spiritual authority is that it appeals wholly to the free choice of a free personality. The certainty of Christian experience may be quite consistent with the presence of intellectual doubt. For objective certainty—that is, such a degree or kind of evidence for the subject-matter of a logical proposition as removes the proposition beyond all question—is not essential for Christian faith. Indeed, it may not even be desirable, if it could be given. For the faith which is sure is a venture beyond the known. It is a self-committal to the reality of the unseen. ' The heart,' as Pascal says, ' has its reasons, which reason does not know.'

Still, it is always possible, and even probable, that rational and spiritual certainty may coincide, and their united authority become a reciprocal assurance sustaining faith. But where reason halts or hesitates before the mysteries of divine grace,

through which the solemn realities of sin and forgiveness, of hope that maketh not ashamed, and of peace which passeth understanding move within the sanctuary of the Christian soul, we may still trust these primal certainties of experience. They constitute a reality which is ultimate and abiding. For, as Dr. Forsyth has assured us, ' Nothing can be so certain to me as this crucial and classic experience of my moral self, my consciousness, my real, surest me.'

VI

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

IN view of the claims made in previous chapters for the supremacy of an internal authority for the Christian faith, a succession of questions will arise in many minds. Is, then, the authority for the Christian faith wholly a matter of individual experience? and, if so, is such experience limited by the measure of each man's personal spiritual capacity, or are there means available for transcending the boundaries of personal experience? Is it not possible to reinforce individual convictions of certainty by a collective certainty of those things most surely believed by a Christian man? Are there not experiences of the redemptive and transforming energies of divine grace outside his own—wider and deeper than his own, to which his own may owe initiation, confirmation, and constraint?

The answer to these and kindred questions is commonly presented by setting forth the Christian doctrine of the Church and her claim to exercise binding authority for the Christian faith. For more than a thousand years of Christian history the solidarity of the Church was based upon such absolute right to exercise final authority. This right was undisputed. It was held to be essential to the unity, validity, and certainty of Christian truth. The faith was one because the Church was one; and the Church was one because Christ was one. For the Church was the vicar of Christ, and

her authority was His authority. There was no other, because there could be no other that was truly Christian. And, consequently, if authority was not exclusive, as well as all-embracing, the vitality and saving efficacy of Christian faith was lost. An infallible Church implied an infallible authority for her teaching. Individual convictions of truth had no authoritative status, and could claim none. They were merely pious opinions which lack the essential note of authority.

Whether the teaching was concentrated upon the past, as in the Eastern Church, and expressed in a body of doctrine formulated once for all and mediated through an unchanging Church, or whether it was regared das progressively developed by the continual indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the Church, as was the case in the Church of the West, it was equally distrustful of the individual. Authority was regarded as resident in an external institution rather than mediated through ethical and spiritual personalities. Its ultimate test was not the redemptive experience and its issues in the transformed character, but a correct ecclesiastical relation to the Church with its unbroken traditions. Consequently doctrines were to be received on the guarantee of the Church, irrespective of the character of their contents. They were either mysteries rising above reason or at best capable of rational defence and explanation when once dogmatically decreed. If conflict arose between this external authority of the Church and the voice of conscience or the clear testimony of redemptive experiences, the decision of the Church, which was the voice of God, must be the final arbiter. To deny this was to be denied the possibility of salvation.

These were the main features of the logical and historical development of the Roman Catholic conception of authority for faith as resident exclusively in the Church. These the Reformation challenged and repudiated.

Whilst agreeing with this challenge, we may nevertheless readily acknowledge the permanent value of the corporate or collective principle. It is a contributory factor in the constitution of a court of appeal of permanent value for the teaching of the Christian faith. It provides in the form of creed and confession a standardized interpretation of the common experience of the Christian community. This common standard makes the faith of the Church a communicable possession as she engages in her educational and missionary activities. Such common confessions of faith also become a bond of union between those who share a common relation to Christ as Saviour and Lord and name His Name together in common prayer and praise. The individual Christian, too, will wisely acknowledge the corporate testimony of the Church with reverence, and with a certain submissiveness of spirit, as being the interpretation of experiences of divine grace known to men whose personal devotion and obedient life may have been truer and deeper than his own. Thus the expressions of the collective experience of the Christian community become valuable means of enlarging, confirming, and correcting individual experience, stimulating its insight, deepening its sense of possibility, and chastening its conceivable vagaries and excesses.

For it must be acknowledged that those who set the ultimate seat of authority for faith within the

individual Christian consciousness are in constant peril of isolating their experiences in subjective judgements of value which find no verification in the common Christian consciousness. An individual's identification of consciousness with reality, however true and authoritative it may be for him, may lead to the false assumption that his own consciousness is the measure of all reality, and that what is not real for him cannot be reality, and therefore authority in the consciousness of others. This is clearly an exaggeration of the appeal to the authority of personal experience. It ignores possible limitations in its validity. We have need, therefore, to recognize and assimilate the value of an authority which lies external to ourselves, the contents of which cannot be discovered by personal analysis or introspection. Thus there may wisely be an external authority such as that which claims allegiance in the Christian Church. But it cannot stand alone. Behind the ecclesiastical lies the experimental.

Historically the acceptance for a practical Christian faith of the primary appeal for certainty to direct personal experience of the work of God in the soul of man, combined with due submission to the corporate experience of the Church expressed in her formularies of worship and doctrine, has been a distinguishing mark of Methodist teaching. This vital combination of experimental and ecclesiastical authority has given Methodism a distinctive position in the Church catholic. Wesley, whether he was consistently aware of all its implications or not, insisted upon the external authority of the Church, which is the root-principle of the Anglican view of certainty for faith, at the same time that

he laid the final stress upon subjective certainties which belong to a heart that is ' strangely warmed ' by the joy of forgiveness and by the personal assurance of newness of life.

It will help us to harmonize these positions, if we bear in mind that it is not to the principle of external authority itself that the Methodist, in common with other Protestants, objects in Catholicism, whether Roman or Anglican, but to its exclusive and final character. For when it is exalted from a means to an end, and made ultimate and binding upon the consciences of men, it consistently tends to repeat St. Augustine's dictum, ' I would not believe in the gospel without the authority of the Church.' But so long as the authority of the Church is presented to the intelligence and conscience of the individual Christian, illumined and taught by the Holy Spirit for his personal consent, as an authority representing the common convictions of the general body of Christian men concerning revealed truth in this and other generations, it has a legitimate place.

But the legitimacy of this authority, let it be noted, depends ultimately upon its verification in the Christian consciousness of the individual believer to whom it makes its appeal for acceptance. For the only authority of the Church's teaching is the authority of its intrinsic truth. The fact of its origin in the wisdom or sanctity of the Church lacks compelling force. Its authority can only be mediated ultimately to the world through personalities touched with the Spirit of Christ and transformed by His power. We cannot too strongly insist that the only authority for faith is that which possesses a power which is making men Christlike. There

is no authority which can be valid for Christian faith without the consent of the free personality to which it appeals. Private judgement is the indefeasible right of the spiritual personality. Whatever the source of an external authority which makes its claim upon him, he has the right to go back for himself to the fountain head, to exercise his privilege of direct access to Christ, and to interpret the ecclesiastical claim in the light of his moral and spiritual consciousness.

The authority of the Church, therefore, is not primary. Valuable as it is, it is secondary. It derives its power from the ultimate experience of divine activity in the individual soul. The Christian Church can only provide social forms of expression for the primary personal experiences of Christian men. At its highest the authority of the Church is the audible voice which speaks the consenting harmony of personal redemptive experiences which are common to all who have joined themselves individually to the mystic fellowship that becomes the Body of Christ. Hence we conclude that the authority of the Church is the form in which the experience of the past is handed down and made available for the present and the future. We cannot afford to ignore ' historical Christianity,' nor to be indifferent to ' the faith of our fathers.' The contribution of the wisdom of the past towards meeting the perplexities of the present is too valuable to neglect. But to become valid authority in any generation the spiritual experiences in which certainty for faith first arose must be repeated in those whose religious consciousness is subjected to its dominion.

VII

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

IT is frequently asserted that at the Reformation an infallible Book was substituted for an infallible Church as the ultimate seat of authority for the Christian faith, thus perpetuating the appeal to an external standard as final. This is not a true account of the situation. It does not take into consideration the radical change in the conception of the Christian life which was the fundamental characteristic of the Reformation faith. The change was really due to the restoration of the appeal for certainty to the authority of a personal experience of redemption that characterized the primitive Christianity of the New Testament. The new sense of the spiritual freedom and worth of the individual which Luther gained through his own religious experience led him to set the acid test of a true Church in the possession of a gospel that was making men Christlike. This test could only be fulfilled through the immediate work of the Holy Spirit within the individual soul. Consequently the original Protestant position in regard to the Bible as the fundamental authority for religious faith was not a commitment to the Bible alone or as a purely external standard. The final appeal is the Bible as interpreted to the individual by the Spirit of God and as verifying its truth in the redemptive experience it creates. This is ultimate both for the individual and the Church.

The authority of the Scriptures for the faith lay in their internal and spiritual values, and not in the value of their literary accuracy or in the certain knowledge of the authorship of their respective books. So little did Luther feel the binding authority of the letter of Scripture that he singled out a gospel within the gospel. He did not hesitate to apply the principle of religious value as a test to the relative authority of different parts of the Bible. It is true that, in the stress of later controversies with Romanists on the question of the infallibility of the Church, some of the reformers allowed themselves to be driven into ascribing infallibility, with its consequent inerrancy and verbal inspiration, to the Bible as a book. But it was the primary appeal to the right of private judgement and to the spiritual basis of authority that was the essence of the Protestant conception of the seat of authority found in the Bible.

It is to this emphasis that both the religious and the scholarly mind of the present day has returned. Under its influence those who hold the evangelical faith turn to the Bible as the Word of Life with renewed confidence and deepened certainty. They loyally accept its authority as the record of the historical facts upon which their faith is founded. Their conviction is that the value of the Scriptures for the Christian man has not been discounted but rather enhanced by recent scholarship. The common assumption that by the processes of critical research the authority of the Scriptures as the means of grace and of salvation has been undermined is not in accord with the facts and certainties of present-day experience. Indeed, it can be demonstrated to any candid inquirer that the evangelical

faith has everything to gain from a sane and reverent criticism. Such criticism is leading us to put first things first. By reposing our faith upon things that cannot be shaken, we are coming to understand the Bible more clearly and to prize more highly its record of the revelation of God, made to man through man. It brings us directly to a knowledge of God in Christ as Saviour and Lord that satisfies our spiritual need. This quiet confidence abides securely in the certainties of His forgiveness and peace, and in sure communion with Him through His indwelling Spirit, whatever may be demonstrated of lack of flawless accuracy in matters of science or historic sequences, occurring in certain portions of the sacred literature.

All this is only to say again that we must seek our certainty for the Christian faith in the realities of our experience of the work of God in our individual souls. In these realities, as they are illumined and assured by the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the saving truths preserved for us in the Bible, we realize the end for which God's revelation in Holy Scripture was given. We may say, therefore, that the authority of the Bible for faith is found in : (1) The spiritual experience it embodies ; and (2) The spiritual experience it creates. We can only briefly indicate these two lines of testimony and proof which the Bible presents afresh to every generation, whatever its critical attitude may be.

(1) The religious experience embodied in the Bible is the highest and most satisfying to the spiritual consciousness of mankind that the human race has attained. Throughout its progressive development from age to age it presents a self-disclosure of God in a living fellowship with men, to

save and to bless. In the Old Testament we have a record of the moral and spiritual experience of men who were ' seers ' in the strictest sense. Their God-given insight is shown by the unfolding of the inner meaning of the dealings of God in mercy and judgement with their own and other nations. By these they were enabled to interpret His character and purpose in the course of human history. The same inspired insight illumined His dealing with individual souls in the discipline of His providence and grace. The vividness and certainty of their moral and spiritual discernment compel us to the conviction that ' holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' This conviction becomes more compelling after historical criticism has used to the full its methods of research than before. The note of authenticity deepens the more we consider the medium of this progressive revelation. This medium is the human mind in its slow upward movement through age-long processes of education. Shaped by the Spirit of God, all human life has thus become the means of expressing in its ethical and spiritual experience the self-uttering presence of the living God ; and this in forms as diverse as primitive science, song, and story, and the matchless religious philosophy of the ethical prophets.

The certainty of the divine authority of the Bible culminates as we consider how this sacred deposit of experience of the self-manifestation of God, preserved through the ages in such earthen vessels, comes to its crown and consummation in the New Testament. Here, in the presentation of God manifest in the flesh, His mind and will stand perfectly revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God. In His

presence we cannot escape from the conviction that we have reached the highest authority known or knowable to men as a basis for religious faith ; ' we needs must love the Highest when we see it.'

(2) The constraint to faith growing out of the religious experiences that the Bible enshrines reaches its climax in the reality and quality of the religious experience the Bible creates. The test of revelation is that it reveals. And the test of the authenticity of a revelation is its power to create afresh the religious experiences it records. Its proof is not in the way the religious revelation comes, but in what it brings. What the New Testament brings is an experience of God in Jesus Christ, which confirms, corrects, and completes all that men had known of God. But it brings more than this. It lifts into certainty the wistful and age-long desires of sinful men to enter into fellowship with God through spiritual affinities. These affinities are quickened within them through the grace of assured forgiveness and through the experiences of a regenerate nature. None can forgive sins save God alone. The spiritual consciousness in which this has been made sure has the witness within itself that the sources in Holy Scripture through which this experience has been mediated are not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. And this is what has happened, and is actually happening, to men of like passions with ourselves. It has happened solely as the result of the message of the Word of Life conveyed through the Bible. The Bible thus presents itself as a message of authority to the intelligence and consciences of men. For the centre of certainty for faith is not God creating and preserving. It is

God redeeming. And we come into personal relation with the redeeming God in Jesus Christ most directly through the Bible. In the clearness with which it presents the truths man needs to know, the adequacy with which it answers his questions and satisfies his needs, and the moving power with which it lays hold upon his conscience and constrains his will, the authority of the Bible resides. Whilst these qualities are not equally apparent in all parts of the Bible, yet through the Bible as a whole the life-giving power of Christ and His renewing energies are consciously experienced by those who receive and obey His spiritual authority. Of this authority the New Testament is the permanent literary and historical record. It thus becomes the rule for Christian faith and practice.

This high note of assurance has received a new certitude rather than otherwise from the new studies inspired by the love of truth to which reverent Christian scholarship has devoted itself for a generation past. Such studies leave us even more sure than the older lines of Bible study that there is no alternative to the gospel of Jesus Christ as enshrined in the New Testament for satisfying the hunger of men's souls for God. This assertion is made doubly sure as it is permanently verified in that 'newest testament,' the testament of Christian experience. For the final certainty of Christian faith is 'written not with ink, but with the spirit of the Living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh . . . the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'

VIII

THE SUPREME CERTAINTY—JESUS CHRIST

THIS must be final. Christ is Himself the supreme Revealer and the perfected Revelation. He constitutes in His person, teaching, and work the first and last authority for the Christian faith. As Christianity is Christ, so its final certainty is Christ. 'The Oracle and the oracles are one'; 'The WORD is before and more than the word.' He constantly and consistently set forth His claim to be above and beyond all other authorities. He corrects, confirms, consummates all that men had known of God.

The Old Testament Scriptures are of authority as they bear witness to Him. In the New Testament there is nothing upon which greater stress is laid than upon the ultimate finality of Christ. Truth and He are one. If there is any access to God, it is in Him alone. He only has the true knowledge of God, and He alone communicates it to others. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' If there is any possibility of true religion, it is in Him; 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.' To be sure of God a man must 'believe in Me,' 'know Me,' 'follow Me,' 'serve Me.' The root question of all certainty is the relation of men to Him. There was no higher appeal than to Himself. This claim first drew men and women to Jesus.

In claiming that religious authority becomes ultimate in Himself He was unique. Every other

great religious teacher—Moses, Isaiah, Paul, John, Plato, Mohammed—was content to announce a message from God. 'They all point the way to the realm of truth, and efface themselves before its eternal and august reality.'[1] Jesus, absolutely alone among all the seers, declares to all seekers after eternal life that He is Himself the Life they seek. He does not assure men that He has seen the vision of God high and lifted up in His temple; He declares that He is the vision. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' Other messengers of God are torch-bearers. 'He is the Light itself'; 'He that followeth Me shall no longer walk in darkness but have the Light of Life.' Other ministers of God's grace point to Another as the Source of pardon and peace. He says, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' Salvation is Christ. It is not His grace so much as Himself. To be one with Him is the Life indeed. He is the Author and Perfecter of Faith. 'As many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become sons of God, even to them that have believed on His name.' He was always meeting the challenge of other authorities by, 'But I say unto you.' In this way He spoke habitually, deliberately, convincingly. And men felt His supremacy; 'never man spake as this Man.' Of set purpose He made men think first and last of Himself whenever they sought to be very sure of God. 'He knew no more sacred task than to point men to His own person.'[2] 'What think ye of Christ?' is fundamental for the assurance of faith.

The authority for the Christian faith thus stands

[1] Cf. Carnegie Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, pp. 5 ff.
[2] Cf. Herrmann, *Communion with God.*

or falls with the fact of Jesus Christ Himself for the religious consciousness. It is their personal attitude to Him that makes men certain or leaves them uncertain; 'Ye will not come unto Me that ye may have life.' In their ultimate reality all religious and redemptive relations between man and God find their certainty in personal relations with Jesus Christ. These relations are immediate. They are satisfying. They are accessible to all. They lie in a sphere of certitude to which literary and historical criticism do not belong. Critical results may verify them, but such results can neither create them nor destroy them. And what we have increasing reason to assert with quiet confidence is that critical results tend to give these personal relations to Jesus Christ a new certainty.

Historical criticism has confirmed the historicity of Jesus. Anthropology, and the comparative study of religious experience, leave the supremacy and satisfying fullness of the redemptive experience of God in Christ enhanced. And wherever the authority of the ancient faith of Christ, as a renewing power, is put to the test of new racial conditions and unlooked-for demands of new environments, at home or abroad, the primacy of Christ as the supreme religious certainty is acknowledged. The fact that Jesus Christ is proving to be indeed the Saviour of the world assures us of the finality of His authority for the religious consciousness of mankind.

But in thus setting the centre of authority for the Christian faith in the person and redemptive energies of Jesus Christ Himself, we are bound to ask ourselves, What is the relation to this final certainty for the Christian faith of those several authorities to which attention has been called in previous

chapters? This is an important question. It is a difficult one to answer in the space which remains. The best answer we can give is that they are the forms in which the supreme authority of Christ is mediated and made manifest to us as a rule of faith and practice. By means of them we register, interpret, and communicate to others the direct personal certainty for faith which is wrought primarily within our personal experience of the redemptive activity of God, reconciling us unto Himself in Jesus Christ. For Christian certainty neither History nor Reason, neither Church nor Scripture has finality. At their best these are the seat only, not the source of authority for the Christian Faith. The one source is Jesus Christ Himself. But that we may learn together and teach one another to know the Lord, He has quickened by His Spirit—the Spirit of Truth, the Lord and Giver of Life—these means and methods of His self-revealing and self-imparting Presence. Each of these authorities is human in origin and constitution. And, because human, each is touched with limitation, fallibility, frailty, without which nothing human grows or continues from generation to generation. This is the permanent truth of the Incarnation: 'The Word was made flesh.' Only in this way could God's ultimate meaning reach us.

> And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought.

Indeed, it may not be too much to say that the vitality of each of these specific authorities may be considered as an extension of the Incarnation. For

it is just as the Divine Life energizes them, and is mediated through them, that they continue their contribution to the sum of Christian certainty. This gives them their unity and their cumulative value as authority for the Christian faith. The degree in which they make Christ surely known is the standard by which we judge of their respective values. Because certainty for Christian faith has its seat where Christ sits, and only there. Without His presence every seat of authority is empty. Not one of them possesses intrinsic authority. Any of them may lose in degree its validity and become merely formal and traditional. Whilst, for instance, it is the fact of Christ that gives history its credential for faith, yet apart from the spiritual fact of His presence abiding with us and within us, even to the end of the age, the religious values of history tend to become reduced by the flight of time. They fade into the pale authority of far-away memory.

Reason, too, without ' the mind which was also in Christ,' carries us no farther than the outer court of the Faith, where the veil still hides from our sight the Light in which spiritual certitude shines. The authority of the Church, which is His body, becomes as the authority of the dead hand without His living presence as Head and Lord. And as the body without the spirit is dead, so is the Bible without the testimony of the living Spirit ; ' the letter killeth, it is the Spirit which quickeneth.' Even religious experience itself loses its certainty for Christian faith when it can be reduced to a purely subjective process. It then becomes a flow of psychological states, touched with a religious emotion, playing about religious ideas and stirring them into religious desires. Spiritual consciousness

must become an experience of Christ Himself, reconciling and transforming, working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, before it can constitute a valid certainty for Christian faith. Psychoanalysis cannot produce Christian certainty. We are not made sure *by* experience but *in* experience. Christ alone makes us sure by the direct working of His Spirit within our own spirits. ' If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' Finally, it must never be forgotten that when decrees for faith, or demands upon faith, which issue from these several seats of authority that we have reviewed, conflict with one another, the final appeal is to Christ, and to Christ as known in His definite and indubitable relation to each man's moral and spiritual self as Redeemer.

Our conclusion, then, is that a Christian man finds certainty for his faith in the verifiable and verified certainty of Christ as the Saviour, to whom the spiritual life owes its origin, and in whom it possesses its present reality. For what he has in Christ is not merely an historic impression, or a status in an ecclesiastical community, but a changed life. Ultimately the Christian faith is not a new creed, nor even a New Testament as a written record, but a new self—a new creation. If certainty does not lie here, where can it be found? If Christ as Redeemer is not real, moral reality, which must always be fundamental for Christian faith, has no meaning. And the ageless strength of authority for Christian faith is still Christ's power on earth to forgive sins and to bring us to God.

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